

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 502

CG 021 148

AUTHOR Lubomski, Lisa; And Others
TITLE Defensive Attributions of Rape When the Victim is Male Versus Female.
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association (68th, Burlingame, CA, April 28-May 1, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attribution Theory; Higher Education; *Rape; *Sex Differences; *Student Attitudes; Undergraduate Students; *Victims of Crime

ABSTRACT

Shaver's Defensive Attribution concept suggests that subjects who perceive themselves as similar to a rape victim attribute less responsibility to the victim, thus protecting themselves against blame should they ever be victims. Studies have supported this interpretation for females, but have reported difficulty interpreting the responses of males. This study extended previous research by including males as victims. It was hypothesized that subjects would attribute the least responsibility for the rape to victims who were most similar to them both in terms of sex and in terms of age and status. The study involved 80 female and 80 male undergraduates in a 2 (sex of subject) x 2 (sex of victim) x 2 (age and status similarity of victim to subject) design. Subjects read a brief description of a sexual assault where the victim was identified as male or female, and as either a 21-year-old college student or a 45-year-old recovering alcoholic. Subjects then rated the victim and the perpetrator on issues of blame. The results revealed a significant main effect for subject age and status similarity on the measure of subject's perceived similarity to the victim, a significant main effect for subject's sex, and a significant two-way interaction between these factors. Female subjects with highly similar victims saw victims as most like themselves. The defensive attribution theory received partial support from the data. (NB)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

"Defensive attributions of rape when the victim is male versus female"

Lisa Lubomski (Johns Hopkins University), Dana D. Anderson (Pacific Lutheran University), Maria Wienhold (Pacific Lutheran University) and Matthew Orme (Pacific Lutheran University)

Jones and Aronson (1973) interpreted their finding that a "less respectable" divorcee rape victim was assigned less responsibility for the rape than were "more respectable" married and virgin rape victims in terms of Lerner's (1970) Just World Hypothesis. In contrast, Fulero and Delara (1976) have suggested that Shaver's (1970) Defensive Attribution concept better accounts for the findings, arguing that in the original study, female college student subjects perceived themselves as more similar to the divorcee victim and attributed less responsibility to her so as to protect themselves against the possibility of being blamed should they ever be themselves victimized. Their studies, involving independent manipulation of similarity and respectability, supported this interpretation for females, but reported difficulty interpreting the responses of males, suggesting that males may have perceived themselves as more similar to male rape perpetrators than to female victims.

This poster reports extension of the Defensive Attribution account and clarification of its role in males' attributions of rape by including males as victims. We hypothesized that subjects would attribute the least responsibility for the rape to victims who were most similar to them both in terms of sex and in terms of age and status. Thus, we anticipated that attributions of blame would be determined by the victim's age and status similarity to the subject and by their gender similarity to the subject. The latter should be jointly determined by the subject's sex in interaction with the victim's sex, such that subjects should

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Dana D. Anderson

attribute lesser blame to same-sex than opposite-sex victims. It was further hypothesized that male subjects who did not perceive themselves as similar to victims either in terms of sex or in terms of age and status would tend to blame victims and to attribute their victimization to chance rather than admit that defendants similar to themselves could have been entirely at fault.

Method

The experiment employed a 2 (sex of subject) x 2 (sex of victim) x 2 (age and status similarity of victim to subject).

Eighty female and eighty male undergraduates at Pacific Lutheran University participated in this study during class sessions for extra credit. Each subject read a brief description, represented as a summary of a case from police files, of a sexual assault where the victim was identified as female or male, and as either a 21-year-old college student (high age and status similarity) or a 45-year-old unemployed recovering alcoholic (low similarity).

Dependent measures consisted of 7-point scales on which subjects answered questions like, "To what extent was the victim responsible for the rape?" (1 = Not at all responsible, 7 = Highly responsible) On measures of blame, subjects were asked about the responsibility of defendant and of victim, and whether they believed the victim: provoked, or encouraged the assault; was careless; could have prevented the assault; and, was victimized by chance. Subjects also indicated whether the perpetrator and victim were: similar to them; respectable; and, likeable.

Results and Discussion

Analysis indicated manipulations were at least partially successful. Analyses of variance revealed a significant main effect for subject age and status similarity on the measure of subject's perceived similarity to the victim, a significant main effect for subject's sex, and a significant two-way interaction between these factors, $F(1,159) = 4.87$, $p \leq .05$. Female subjects with highly similar victims saw victims as most like themselves. However, the anticipated interaction between subject's and victim's sex failed to materialize. As no other significant interactions were obtained on any analyses, main effects only for all analyses are presented in Table 1.

Contrary to expectations, we found no significant main or interaction effects on measures of perpetrator's or victim's responsibility for the rape. However, on the other blame measures, as compared to female subjects, males were significantly more likely to judge victims as having encouraged the attack, as careless, and as having failed to prevent the attack when they could have done so. However, males were significantly less likely than female subjects to attribute the victimization to chance. Thus, males did appear to blame the victim and to do so, contrary to expectations, to such a degree that they saw the victim, more than chance as at fault for the attack.

Consistent with Fulero and Delara's (1976) application of Shaver's (1970) Defensive Attribution notion to attributions concerning rape victims, victims perceived as highly similar in age and status to subjects were blamed less for the rape. ANOVA main effects revealed that as compared to their low similarity counterparts, high similarity subjects were significantly less likely to judge victims as having provoked or encouraged the assault. No other significant main or interaction effects were obtained for this factor on the blame measures.

In an earlier study that did not manipulate age and status similarity but did use male victims, Howard (1984b) found greater attribution of global, characterological blame to female than male victims. In contrast, we found only one significant ANOVA main effect for victim's sex on any blame measure. Female victims were judged by all subjects to be more careless than male victims.

Jones and Aronson (1973) originally proposed that the rape victim's respectability played the major role in determining attributions of responsibility while Fulero and Delara (1976) argued for perceived similarity in that role. While we did not directly test these competing interpretations, our findings do suggest that perceived age and status similarity does affect judgements of respectability. ANOVA main effects indicated that victims highly similar to subjects were judged by them as significantly more respectable and significantly more likeable than were low similarity victims, regardless of victim's sex. Further, the dependent measure of perceived victim similarity was positively correlated with that of victim's respectability, ($r = .41$, $p \leq .001$, two-tailed).

Interestingly, the ANOVA also revealed that the perpetrators of attacks against high similarity victims were seen

as significantly less respectable than perpetrators against low similarity victims. No significant difference in the likeability of perpetrators was found and, again, no significant interactions were obtained.

Shaver's (1970) defensive attribution theory received partial support from this data. Its prediction of lesser same-sex than opposite-sex victim blaming was not supported. However, neither was an alternate theory of blaming, namely Walster's (1966) with its predicted greater same-sex than opposite-sex blaming and its links to Lerner's (1970) Just World Hypothesis. Further, all subjects tended to least blame those subjects most like themselves as defensive theory predicts. Moreover, female subjects, who as a group saw themselves as more similar to the victim regardless of the victim's sex than male subjects did, also blamed victims less than males did. This outcome too is consistent with defensive theory.

Males' greater tendency to blame the victim does not seem based, however, on defensiveness due to their greater than females identification with the rapist since neither sex admitted to identification with the perpetrator. Further, t tests failed, contrary to our hypothesis, to indicate significant differences between the attributions of the assault to chance made by those male subjects least like their stimulus victims (i.e., those with female, dissimilar in age and status victims) and comparable attributions by subjects in other conditions. Apparently, males found it more difficult to identify with any rape victim than females do and so have less reason to protect themselves psychologically against the possibility of being blamed should they ever be raped. Females, for whom the danger of rape is a greater actuarial risk and for whom victimization is consistent with gender stereotyping (Howard, 1984a), more readily identify with rape victims of either sex and attribute blame accordingly. Such attribution in this context might more appropriately be characterized as "empathic" rather than "defensive."

References

- Fulero, S.M., & Delara, C. (1976). Rape victims and attributed responsibility: A defensive attribution approach. Victimology: An International Journal, 1, 551-563.
- Howard, J.A. (1984a). The "normal" victims: The effects of gender stereotypes on reactions to victims. Social Psychology Quarterly, 47, 270-281.
- Howard, J.A. (1984b). Societal influences on attribution: Blaming some victims more than others. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 47, 494-505.
- Shaver, K.G. (1970). Defensive attribution: Effects of severity and relevance on the responsibility assigned for an accident. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 14, 101-113.
- Walster, E. (1966). Assignment of responsibility for an accident. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3, 73-79.

Table 1. Effects of Subject Gender, Victim Gender, Victim Similarity on Attributions of Blame, Similarity and Respectability to Perpetrator and Victim.

Dependent Variables	Subject Sex			Victim Sex			Victim Similarity		
	Category	Means		Category	Means		Category	Means	
	F	Male	Female	F	Male	Female	F	Similar	Diff.
Blame Measures									
Perpetrator Responsibility	2.07	5.69	6.11	1.40	5.72	6.07	2.07	5.69	6.11
Victim Responsibility	0.33	1.90	1.79	0.10	1.81	1.88	0.68	1.76	1.92
Victim Provoked	0.95	2.31	2.13	0.11	2.19	2.25	3.57 [~]	2.04	2.40
Victim Encouraged	4.24 [*]	2.53	2.13	0.02	2.31	2.34	4.24 [*]	2.13	2.53
Victim Careless	7.36 ^{**}	3.45	2.85	5.11 [*]	2.90	3.40	2.16	2.99	3.31
Victim Prevention	13.38 ^{***}	3.99	3.14	1.40	3.42	3.70	1.67	3.71	3.41
Victim By Chance	3.98 [*]	4.38	4.89	0.85	4.51	4.75	0.12	4.59	4.68
Similarity Measures									
Perpetrator Similarity	0.33	1.59	1.49	1.69	1.42	1.65	1.33	1.64	1.44
Victim Similarity	4.38 [*]	2.63	3.09	0.54	2.78	2.94	61.83 ^{***}	3.72	1.99
Respectability Measures									
Perpetrator Respectability	0.45	2.22	2.36	0.30	2.35	2.24	4.56 ^{**}	2.08	2.51
Perpetrator Likeability	0.39	2.90	3.03	0.56	2.89	3.04	1.27	2.85	3.08
Victim Respectability	1.06	4.44	4.66	1.59	4.41	4.69	31.51 ^{***}	5.16	3.94
Victim Likeability	0.00	4.07	4.09	1.84	3.96	4.20	38.52 ^{***}	4.63	3.54

[~] $p < .10$

^{*} $p < .05$

^{**} $p < .01$

^{***} $p < .001$